

OBITUARY

Judy Wilkenfeld

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When Judy Wilkenfeld died on 24 May 2007 after a protracted battle with pancreatic cancer, the world lost more than one of its most important tobacco control leaders. Judy's contributions to tobacco control were extraordinary, but what made Judy Wilkenfeld unique were the ways she brought people together, made everyone with whom she came into contact better, and became a close and trusted friend, confidante, mentor, and role model to so many people with whom she worked—young and old, from different continents, cultures, ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and world views.

Judy contributed to the effort to reduce the death toll from tobacco use for more than 20 years. However, until she left federal service in 1999 few people outside of her close friends were aware of her contributions. The fact that for nearly two decades Judy's name rarely appeared next to her important contributions is a testament to her commitment to doing what is right.

Judy Wilkenfeld joined the Federal Trade Commission in 1980, where she served for 14 years as Program Advisor for Tobacco (the person in charge of all tobacco related matters for the FTC) and assistant director for advertising practices in the Bureau of Consumer Protection. Judy was the FTC's lead attorney in *FTC vs Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp* in 1985, the case that served as a catalyst for the first real expose about the ways tobacco companies manipulate their products to deceive the public. She served as lead attorney for the FTC "In the Matter of RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company" in 1990, the first case brought by the US government that challenged a tobacco industry advertisement that wrongfully disputed the health risks of smoking. She also was instrumental in the FTC decision to sue RJ Reynolds over the tobacco company's use of the cartoon character, "Joe Camel," and in crafting the government's regulations governing health warnings on smokeless tobacco products pursuant to the Comprehensive Smokeless Tobacco Health Education Act of 1986.

Listing Judy's achievements at the FTC however does not do justice to what she accomplished. She continually battled a bureaucracy that was more supportive of the tobacco companies than our nation's health. She persevered, often alone, to fight for what was right.

In 1994, the US Food and Drug Administration announced that it was investigating the tobacco industry to determine whether it had authority over tobacco products and their marketing. At the invitation of the FDA's Dr David Kessler, Judy joined the FDA as "special advisor for tobacco policy." It is hard to describe the commitment of time, energy, and scholarship that Judy contributed to the FDA's effort between 1994 and 1996. The net result was that the FDA team produced a brilliant document—the 28 August 1996 FDA Regulations and statement of its grounds for jurisdiction, one that is responsible for a fundamental reshaping of how people think of tobacco and the tobacco industry.

Judy's retirement from federal service was just the beginning of a new career. At the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Judy participated in and helped to formulate the public health community's policy positions at every Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) negotiating session between 1999 and 2003, but it is fair to say that she was most proud of the emergence of the Framework Convention Alliance, the first

truly international alliance of non-governmental organisations in support of tobacco control that now includes more than a hundred organisations from all over the world.

Judy's role in the FCA was quintessentially Judy. To her it was essential that every person's voice be heard without regard to whether they came from a wealthy nation or a poor nation, the north or the south, or were part of a powerful organisation or the smallest NGO. Her interaction with the members of the FCA reflected how she lived her life. Her commitment to civil rights and equal treatment wasn't rhetoric. She showed that Martin Luther King's dream of a world where people are judged by the content of their character and not the colour of their skin is possible—from her early involvement in the civil rights movement, to Jon and Judy's adoption of an African-American infant at a time when interracial adoption was extremely controversial and to her insistence on the equal treatment of the poorest countries in the Framework Convention Alliance.

In a movement whose strength depends on its ability to agree and unite, Judy brought people together. She routinely brought out the best in her colleagues during the FCTC negotiations. Without her ability to bring discordant voices together into a powerful unified voice, civil society would not have had the same impact during the challenging negotiations that led to the FCTC.

Mary Assunta from Malaysia captured Judy's humility in a note when she wrote that at the same time Judy would lend her almost unparalleled knowledge and expertise of tobacco control to others, she would make clear that in her mind she was always learning more from others than she was giving. Other members of FCA recounted that at one moment Judy would be chairing a meeting or demystifying a complex point of tobacco control, and the very next minute she would volunteer to get a room ready for the next meeting, and like a mother, look out for the wellbeing of each of the participants.

Judy was a devoted colleague and consummate professional, but first and foremost she was a wife, mother, and grandmother. To know Judy for 30 seconds was to appreciate her unequivocal love for her family. How many people had meetings with Judy where the only thing they can remember is her talking glowingly and with pride about her husband, children, or her grandchildren?

Judy's impact goes so far beyond her professional achievements. She may no longer be with us but her legacy will continue every day in the hundreds of people from every walk of life whom she inspired. Judy inspired, taught, mentored, and befriended hundreds of tobacco control advocates. She did so because of her humility, her love of her fellow human beings, and her respect for every person with whom she dealt. Her legacy will live on in the work that those she inspired continue to do.

Joel Spivak, a long time campaign colleague who loved Judy dearly, summed up his feelings better than I could. He wrote:

"In any lifetime you meet a few people who are unique, special and unforgettable. It's a quality you can't teach. It's a gift. Judy had it."

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